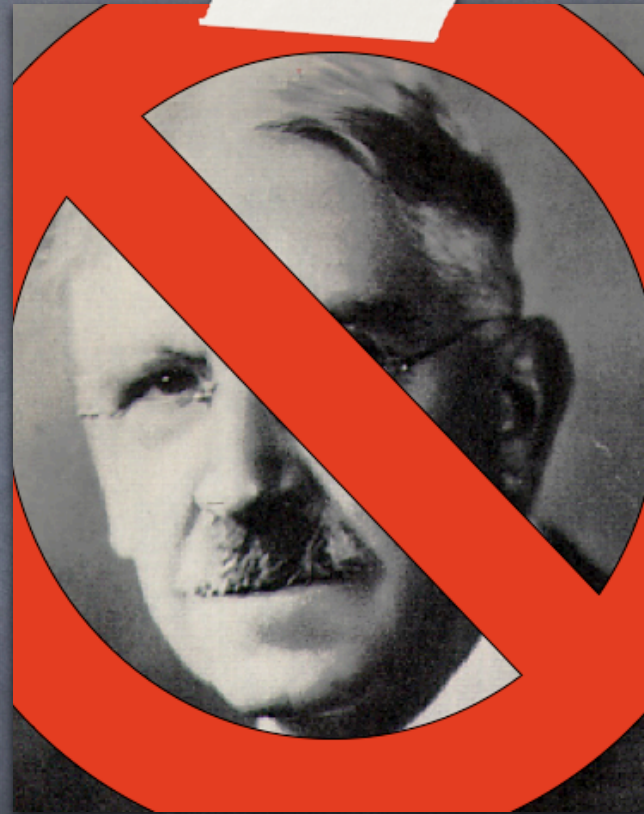


"The Basics" of Essentialism:

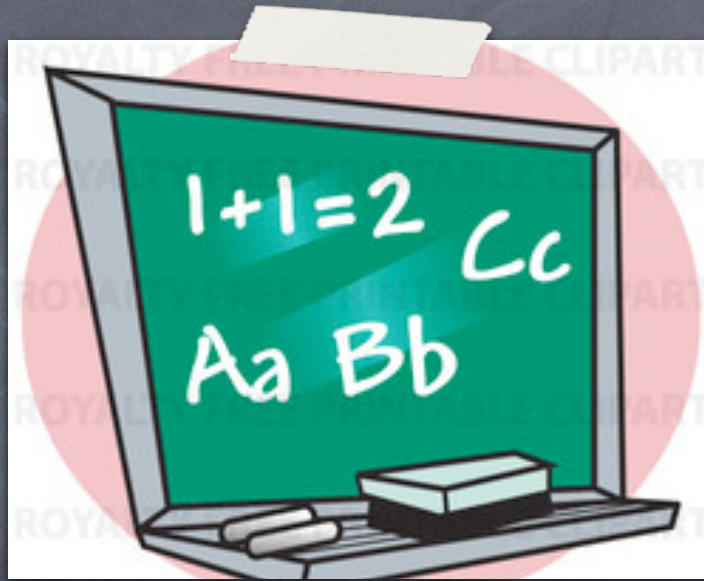
an enduring philosophy of education

How It Came About:

- In response to John Dewey and the Progressive Movement in education of the 1920s
- Emphasizes rigorous teacher-centered education vs. child-centered learning
- 1934: William C. Bagley wrote Education and Emergent Man, criticizing active learning; he believed it “damaged the intellect and moral standards of students”



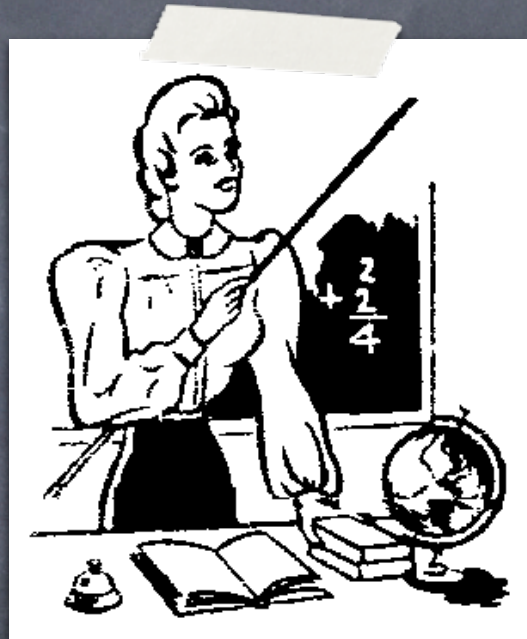
What It Is:



Essentialism: concept of universal education; the belief that there is essential knowledge that everyone in a given culture must have in order to be a knowledgeable and fully participating member of that culture. It is a school's responsibility to provide that knowledge.

Teacher's Role

- ✓ As an expert
- ✓ Impart essential knowledge
- ✓ Direct focused tasks



Student's Role

- ✓ Listen and learn
- ✓ Trust that the teacher knows best

How It Fits In:

- Similar to Perennialism: both idealistic and stress a traditional canon of knowledge: history, foreign language, religion and literature.
- Differences: essentialism promotes modification of "core knowledge" to reflect current culture (always changing). It also stresses realism, or using the knowledge and skills to become a functioning and productive member of that culture, outside of academia.



Conflict Throughout 20th Century:

1969: Herbert R. Kohl publishes The Open Classroom, again promoting child-centered education and active learning.

The “Back-to-Basics” Movement of the 1970s and 1980s is born, in part, in critical response to Kohl’s book -- a throwback to essentialism of the 1930s.

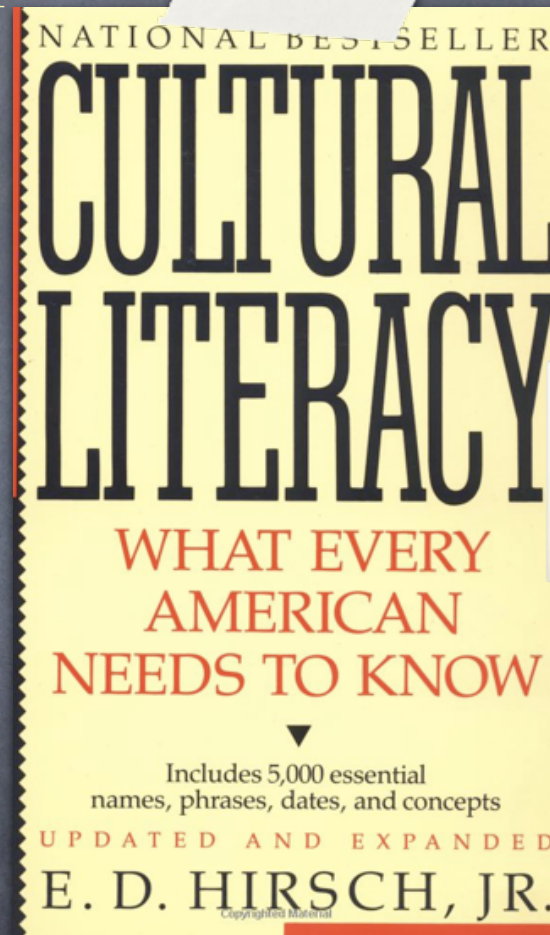
Modern Application of Essentialism:

- ✓ 1984: Ted Sizer creates Coalition of Essential Schools
- ✓ 900 member schools, 3 countries
- ✓ support from Brown University
- ✓ eliminate non-core subjects to allow focus on traditional subjects
- ✓ Nine Principles “soften” essentialism



1987: E.D. Hirsch publishes Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know

- Believed there is a broad “American culture” that we can all access if we are taught.
- Egalitarian
- 5000 key terms that everyone should know when leaving high school
- “Core concepts” open to change because culture changes (encourages people to suggest new terms)



“Literate culture is the most democratic culture in our land: it excludes nobody, it cuts across generations and social groups and classes, it is not usually one’s first culture, but it should be everyone’s second”
(Hirsch, 1987, p. 21).

Early 1990s to present:
Diane Ravitch is a Major Proponent



- As Assistant Secretary of Education under George H. W. Bush, she “led the federal effort to promote the creation of state and national academic standards” (Ravitch, 2009).
- Author of National Standards in American Education: A Citizen's Guide (1995) and Left Back: A Century of Failed School Reform (2000), among seven other books.

Modern Application of Essentialism:

- ✓ No Child Left Behind's emphasis on reading, math (and, to some degree, science)
- ✓ Maine Learning Results' standards set for every student graduating from high school
- ✓ Coalition of Essential Schools still generating support in many areas, including (in Maine) Falmouth, Poland, Noble, and Yarmouth High Schools

What Do You Think?

Think back to the main concepts of Essentialism: traditional subjects, core knowledge essential for every student to master, applicable to current culture to create productive citizens. What seems beneficial?
What seems problematic?

Benefits

Concerns

What Do You Think?

Think back to the main concepts of Essentialism: traditional subjects, core knowledge essential for every student to master, applicable to current culture to create productive citizens. What seems beneficial?
What seems problematic?

Benefits

- ★ Democratic and egalitarian
- ★ Objective and easily applicable
- ★ Discrete concepts (such as 5000 terms) are easily tested
- ★ Respectful of changing culture

Concerns

- 5,000 terms is unrealistic; who decides the concepts?
- Could be used to maintain status quo rather than foster social change
- Elimination of electives could reduce student motivation and interest
- No vocational programs requires post-secondary education for all students
- Teacher-centered philosophy reduces student ownership of information

Bibliography

- Calhoun, Ramon. (2002) CES national affiliate schools. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from <http://www.essentialschools.org/cs/schools/query/q/562?x-r=runnew>
- Goldberg, Mark F. (1996). Here for the long haul. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 77 (6), 685-687.
- Hirsch, E.D. (1988). *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know*. New York: Random House.
- Johnson, James A. (2002). Introduction to the foundations of American education. 12th Edition. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Null, Wesley J. (2007). William C. Bagley and the founding of essentialism: An untold story in American educational history. *Teachers College Record*, 109 (4), 1013-1055.
- Ravitch, Diane. *Diane Ravitch curriculum vitae*. Retrieved July 1, 2009, from <http://www.dianeravitch.com/vita.html>